

## The remedy for common E-mail pitfalls

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: **Business communications has never been more complicated - Cell phones, video conferencing, e-mails, web content, correspondence, reports and presentations cause even the greatest writer or orator to stir with apprehension that their message is clearly understood. Each month this column will explore the many different ways each of us can learn to communicate more plainly.**)

Have you ever hit the "reply to all" button instead of the "reply" button on an email and shared way too much about yourself with way too many people on accident? Have you ever written something about an annoying co-worker, sent it to your best friend at work, only to realize you typed in the wrong e-mail address and your snarky email went to someone with a similar name in accounting instead? Have you ever thought you were being "yelled at" because someone sent you an email in ALL CAPS? Oops!

There are many reasons to respect the rules of email. Besides embarrassment, your professionalism, credibility, and reputation are on the line each time you send an email. Are you sending emails that are full of typos and misspelled words? If so, the receiver will think you don't know how to spell or that you are simply lazy. Neither projects the right image for career success. Do you take a loooooooooooooooooonnnng time to respond to email inquiries? If so, your silence might be telling the world that you don't care, are too busy or the request is irrelevant.

If you have done any of the above-mentioned things, you are not alone. Hopefully it wasn't a serious offense and hopefully you learned from your mistake. But, if you haven't learned from past mistakes, or just haven't made any (yeah, right) the following list is for you. We all need a refresher course from time to time.

- DON'T WRITE IN ALL CAPS---it is the equivalent of yelling at someone. This is still one of the most common email mistakes. It's okay to use all caps in headings and to emphasize certain words, but that's all.
- Use proper spelling, grammar and punctuation. It is important to do so to convey the proper meaning of your message. Plus, it makes you look smart.
- If you are upset with someone, don't send an email. It is best to cool off first, or even sleep on it overnight, and then go talk with the person next day. Many relationships have been ruined because someone was trigger-happy with the "send" button.
- If the topic is touchy or sensitive, it's best to talk fact-to-face or on the phone. Emotion and expression does not translate well in email messages and often times people are misunderstood.
- Use emotions sparingly. When used appropriately, emotions (those little smiley faces that are included in emails on occasion) can help clarify your message. Just be careful. Too many emotions could make your email look more like a note written by a kid in junior high.
- Keep information short and simple. Rambling for many paragraphs before making a point is a guarantee that your email message will not get read.

*-Continued-*

### *E-mail Dos and Don'ts Continued -*

- Add a signature line to your e-mails, including your name, title and contact info.
- If you are going to forward a message to someone else, delete all the unnecessary information first, like the email address of the fifty people that received the email before you did.
- Use blank lines to separate paragraphs.
- Use a descriptive subject line to make your email stand out. This will help the recipient organize and prioritize email. However, don't type your whole message in the subject line either.
- Don't forward chain letters and jokes. It's just annoying.
- Do not use email to discuss confidential information.
- Only copy other people or "reply to all" if the people on that list really need to see your response. We all get too many emails and this is a time-waster.
- Use the "bcc" button sparingly or when you are sending out an email to a large group of people that do not want their email addresses shared with the rest of the world.
- Try not to write mean or rude emails. If you do happen to get into an "e-mail war" with someone, don't copy everyone else on your "flames" to that person. That is the equivalent of publicly berating someone. Keep it private or keep it to yourself.
- Most importantly, don't write anything that you wouldn't say in public, post on a bulletin board, or print on the front page of the newspaper. Scary, huh? I think we are all lulled into a false sense feeling anonymous when using email.

A great snapshot of how poor e-mail etiquette or language can come back to haunt the sender was published in a recent story in USA Today that released portions of Michael Brown's e-mails during the Katrina Hurricane disaster. Brown resigned shortly after the Hurricane as the director of the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA).

Go here for details: [USA Today On-Line](#)